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Official Records

7th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 June 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Wilmot (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Jaime David Fernández, Vice-President of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Jaime David Fernández, Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Fernández (Dominican Republic) (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the President of the Dominican Republic, Mr. Leonel Fernández, and of the entire Government team, it is my honour to convey to the General Assembly my country's ideas and thoughts on Agenda 21.

Our Government is committed and duty-bound to consolidate the activities of Government and civil society in order to implement the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, objectives that were endorsed by my country.

We view the elimination of poverty as a basic priority if we are to achieve sustainable development; we are taking action to attain that goal, particularly in the areas of job creation and food security, with our programmes for support of micro-enterprises and small businesses for women and young people, and for education and training on environmental issues and on the new concept of development. Specifically, we are introducing curriculum changes for primary and secondary education and designing and implementing plans and programmes for non-formal education for community groups.

We know that organizations in civil society require participatory space enabling them to be involved in the development process and to become real actors, alongside Government organizations, in management and decision-making, especially at the local level, and in designing and following up national development policies. The development process requires a united vision if it is to be sustainable, and it requires joint responsibility on the part of the public and the private sectors to ensure continuity combined with the political stability that strengthens democratic governance.

We are facing great obstacles imposed by our external debt payments, and we need to find ways to launch development programmes that can generate wealth both for developed countries and for countries that are seeking well-being and prosperity with optimism and a willingness to work.

I want to stress that to achieve sustainable development we have to remember that sustainability must be built from the bottom up: local problems require

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local solutions, and only the local communities have the key. Without responsible and well-informed citizen participation in decision-making, it will be difficult to establish a process of sustainable development. That is why we have established our Provincial Development Councils, in which government institutions and the civil society of each province will participate, with a view to bringing about decentralization. We do not see this as a loss of power for the central Government but rather as a guarantee that policies determined at the central level will be effective and clearly understood at the local level.

Our indigenous people called the island shared today by the Dominican Republic and Haiti "Quisqueya", which means "Mother of all lands", and the Dominican Government has now initiated a national plan that we call "Quisqueya, For Ever Green", which seeks to generate wealth and improve the living conditions of the rural population through the development, utilization and conservation of our natural resources. Our natural and environmental resources are the main attractions for tourism, which in our country and in other nations of the Caribbean is the most important economic activity. That is why we need a healthy Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea, and why we need to work together to prevent polluting waste from being dumped into their waters.

The environment knows no borders; it is the globalization of nature. To defend it we need the coordinated action of all nations and international organizations. Human beings are central to nature, and it is our shared responsibility, and the commitment of our Government, to guarantee development in well-being and dignity.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic for his statement.

Mr. Jaime David Fernández, Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Norbert Marxer, Minister of the Environment of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Norbert Marxer, Minister of the Environment of Liechtenstein, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Marxer (Liechtenstein): In 1992 the Rio Conference not only promised hope for better living conditions in many parts of the world, but also served as a starting point for comprehensive efforts and common actions by numerous institutions, groups and individuals. In the overall assessment of the implementation of the Rio commitments, we have to face the fact that today we are farther away from the global turnaround that is needed in order to achieve sustainable development than we were five years ago. The final documents of Rio need to be reaffirmed as the foundations and long-term policy framework for sustainable development.

We have now identified the human activities the uncontrolled expansion of which affects the ecological balance. We have now found ways and means of following with decisive and clearly targeted steps the path of sustainable development. The Government of Liechtenstein is ready to shoulder its part of the common responsibility for the integrity of the global environment, development and peace. Even though Governments bear the main responsibility for implementing Agenda 21 and the Rio commitments, all groups in society must be able to take an active part in the process of promoting sustainable development, and thus also commit themselves to change.

Allow me now to highlight just a few aspects that Liechtenstein considers to be crucial in attaining our common goal of sustainable development, and let me turn to some areas of particular concern to us.

Since Liechtenstein is dependent on imports for more than 90 per cent of its energy, Liechtenstein attaches the utmost importance to a comprehensive and coherent energy policy. Energy plays a key role in achieving the economic, social and environmental objective of sustainable development, and the supply of energy must be secure and reliable.

Energy issues are also at the heart of current endeavours to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions. We call on all industrialized countries to commit themselves to substantial reduction targets and timetables as soon as possible. We do not expect our partners from developing countries to assume reduction obligations under the Berlin Mandate, but we hope they will soon be ready to adopt their own reduction schemes.

In the area of transport in particular, we are not moving towards greater sustainability. On the contrary, road transport is constantly expanding, and the impact on the environment and human well-being thus also continues to be very great. Efficiency gains are immediately offset by volume increases. Traffic emissions constitute serious health risks in many regions

of the world, and while awareness is growing regarding the high financial and health costs of dependence on motor vehicles, there are still no specific economic incentives or financial mechanisms in place to strengthen other means of transportation. The impact on the environment, especially in transit countries like ours, seems to be giving ever more cause for concern. Progress is needed at the regional and subregional levels, and a common strategy for an environmentally sound transportation situation in Europe and a more detailed programme for action must be formulated.

As an Alpine country, Liechtenstein is highly dependent on the protective functions of its forests. By tradition, Liechtenstein is especially concerned about sustainable forest management practices. Firmly convinced of the environmental, economic, social and cultural importance of all types of forests, Liechtenstein supports all efforts aimed at establishing an international, legally binding, comprehensive and coherent instrument on sustainable forest management.

The role of the Commission on Sustainable Development as a high-level forum for discussion of the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainable development must be reaffirmed. Each year the Commission should choose one very specific theme of common concern to be discussed in all its facets. Specific goals of action-oriented programmes must call for target-oriented, decisive and binding, but differentiated, action. In the establishment of programmes for action, targets which are noticeably above the threshold of current environmental standards must be set for both industrialized and developing countries. To improve the global capability for keeping the environment and sustainable development under review, urgent action is required for the elaboration of environment and sustainable development indicators.

The institutional setting for sustainable development and global environmental issues must be strengthened and made more focused. Since many challenges of sustainable development have different configurations from one region of the world to another, we support every effort towards strengthening the regional dimension of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Only this regionalized approach will ensure that common problems, although global in nature, are dealt with at the regional level, not on the basis of the lowest common denominator.

In 1992 the Governments of the developed countries reaffirmed their commitment to reaching the target of providing 0.7 per cent of their gross national product in official development assistance. Aiming to reach an official development assistance of 1 per cent of public expenditure, the Liechtenstein Government has steadily increased its development assistance during recent years and will continue to do so. Allocating financial resources and promoting technology transfer and capacity-building are the most important elements in implementing the principles of Agenda 21 in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. As far as financing is concerned, domestic and external, as well as public and private, resources are required. This official development assistance should be used creatively both as a catalyst for sustainable development and to improve the working environment for private sector operations in countries and sectors that would otherwise not attract private investment.

Let us jointly assume responsibility and make substantial progress on the path to sustainable development.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment of Liechtenstein for his statement.

Mr. Norbert Marxer, Minister of the Environment of Liechtenstein, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Yao Komlavi, Minister of the Environment and Forest Resources of Togo.

Mr. Yao Komlavi, Minister of the Environment and Forest Resources of Togo, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Komlavi (Togo) (*interpretation from French*): It appeared at one time that, with regard to the environment, man had unfortunately adopted one of the principles of the fish, which is not to start thinking until it was in the net. Fortunately, the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992 was a salutary point of departure marking the awakening of humankind at large.

A brief survey of the results achieved globally five years later arouses concerns and questions about all kinds of capacities, and especially about the will and determination of the international community to respond to its commitments and to bring about a serious and sincere partnership, which is essential to facing environmental challenges. The New York meeting therefore comes just in the nick of time. It should provide an opportunity for our States individually and the

international community as a whole to evaluate what has happened since Rio 1992.

With regard to our country, the sociopolitical context that accentuated the economic crisis in Togo at the time of the Rio Conference not only delayed the implementation of the commitments we undertook, but also interrupted the noteworthy actions initiated with regard to the environment and was especially damaging to natural resources. This is the most telling illustration of principle 25 of the Rio Declaration, which states,

> "Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible."

Despite its handicap at the time when Agenda 21 began to be implemented, Togo has tried to live up to its commitments.

In the social and economic fields, a programme to combat poverty and a programme to strengthen national development capacities have been adopted. A national policy in the social and health fields has also been adopted.

Legislatively, apart from the law establishing the environmental code in 1988, Togo has included the question of the protection and management of a sound and development-oriented environment in article 41 of its new Constitution. It has acceded to and ratified the Conventions on biodiversity and climate change, as well as the Convention to Combat Desertification, and has undertaken specific actions to implement them. Apart from these Conventions spawned by the Commission on Sustainable Development, Togo has ratified virtually all the conventions relating to rational management of the environment.

Institutionally, the inter-ministerial Commission for the Environment was created in order to facilitate the coordination of environmental policies and to promote consideration of the environment in the programmes and projects of all development sectors. The National Committee for the Environment, which plays the role of a national Commission on Sustainable Development, will be formed next July.

Togo has just adopted, under the aegis of the coordinating component of the National Plan of Action for the Environment, a draft declaration on national environmental policies. The National Forestry Plan of Action has been drawn up, and it contains priority projects, such as the 10-year reforestation programme for 1998-2007 in order to counteract the considerable deterioration of natural resources of recent years. A programme for managing the environment is being prepared and will become operational in 1998.

These achievements have been possible in record time thanks to the assistance given by all the social and professional sectors of the population — the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and local communities — after appropriate measures had been taken to raise consciousness.

For us, what has been undertaken to date resembles the dance of a tortoise inside its shell. We would like to have palpable results for our population. Unfortunately, it must be concluded that the problems in the field continue to increase. Water is far from being brought under control, especially in making drinking water available to most people. Various forms of pollution are increasing. Although populations, for the most part, understand well the need to protect the environment, they continue to overexploit natural resources in order to survive.

With regard to international cooperation and partnership in the area of environment, Togo is among the countries not receiving support. It must nevertheless be recognized that in view of the efforts our country has made recently in the area of environment, Togo has received some encouraging promises. We believe that someone who whistles is also willing to sing. We would therefore like to thank everyone for their support and we will thank them for fulfilling their promises.

By way of making another contribution to this important meeting, Togo would like to suggest that the Rio Declaration, like the complementary one to come out of New York, should be regarded as a blueprint that mankind as a whole should follow. Furthermore, it will be necessary to identify realistic programmes and priority projects that can be carried out within, say, five years. This should be done at the regional level according to physical, biological or financial similarities, and there should be a mid-term review that will make it possible to make the necessary adjustments in time.

It is for this reason that our country humbly requests the General Assembly to give serious consideration to the proposal made by the African ministers of environment last March at Ouagadougou. That proposal has already been submitted to this session of the General Assembly by Comrade Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic

of Zimbabwe and current President of the Organization of African Unity. This will involve supporting as priority projects in that region the struggle against poverty and desertification and the provision of potable water and alternative sources of energy to populations.

Finally, Togo hopes that the entire international community will consider the problems of the environment as a human emergency that should be dealt with appropriately. The political and economic measures often taken by the countries of the North against our States have severe detrimental impacts on poor populations, and consequently on the environment.

The environment is a resource shared by all mankind. The fate of the rich and of the poor are interrelated. Therefore, it is only by working together that we can win.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment and Forest Resources of Togo for his statement.

Mr. Yao Komlavi, Minister of the Environment and Forest Resources of Togo, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Samuel Bigawa, Minister of Land Management and the Environment of Burundi.

Mr. Samuel Bigawa, Minister of Land Management and the Environment of Burundi, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Bigawa (Burundi) (*interpretation from French*): It is a pleasure and a great honour for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the Government of Burundi on the occasion of this special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which is to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21 five years after the Rio Conference.

When we adopted Agenda 21 at Rio, we knew that we were establishing a framework for a new relationship between human beings and nature. Its implementation obliges various countries to shoulder their responsibilities to history and to mankind and forces them to make difficult choices. These are difficult because they have to reconcile science, ethics and economics, all of which are indispensable factors for sustainable development.

Agenda 21, which is the fruit of the agreement of the more than 180 States represented at Rio, is a vast programme of action for the twenty-first century. It is a catalogue of measures that seeks to reconcile through genuine world partnership a double imperative — a sound environment, on the one hand, and a healthy economy, on the other — in order to achieve sustainable human development.

Today there is general agreement on the need to direct all our efforts at the national and international levels towards sustainable development. The attainment of that commendable objective is a prerequisite for our survival on this planet. The various documents that came out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development — namely, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification, provide the foundation and the framework for our general policies and should guide all our decisions within the context of an integrated approach to environmental policies for sustainable development.

At the international level, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development helped raise the awareness of all social actors, including political leaders, representatives of citizens' movements, the scientific community and the media, of the relationship between sustainable development and the environment. In addition, international environmental law was enriched by the new principles set forth at the Rio Conference. Moreover, the relationship between the environment and development has become so essential that success in maintaining the links between them dictates whether or not the world environment can be preserved.

With regard to my country, Burundi, with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme and other international organizations, has made some measure of progress in implementing Agenda 21, including by ratifying seven conventions relating to the environment. We have prepared a national environmental strategy and plan of action and have drawn up an environmental code and framework law. We are providing management training and trying to preserve biological diversity. We are working on the management of solid waste and wastewater and are making efforts to combat deforestation. We are attempting to change consumption patterns in the areas of agriculture and food, rural housing, energy and health.

Despite our good intentions of living up to the commitments made at Rio, Burundi has fallen short of what it was supposed to do in accordance with the programme set out in Agenda 21 because of various constraints, particularly the social and political crisis that erupted in October 1993, the effects of which were felt by the environment. After inter-ethnic massacres, thousands of people were forced to gather in camps for displaced persons. Refugees came from neighbouring countries and swelled the ranks of internally displaced persons, which was a major cause of environmental degradation in the form of deforestation, to meet energy needs, the pollution of rivers and the destruction of infrastructures.

At present recovery efforts are under way — to rebuild dwellings thanks to the assistance of the African Development Fund; to ensure reafforestation, with help from the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and to rebuild our infrastructure, with support from non-governmental organizations and international agencies.

Burundi would like to take this opportunity to express its profound gratitude to the various United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working in Burundi that have continued to help us restore our devastated environment.

In addition to its programme to restore peace, ensure security for all citizens and provide for economic recovery, the Government of Burundi is currently also trying to implement Agenda 21 through several projects, including reafforestation schemes in the north of the country to combat the impending risk of desertification, to protect biodiversity by maintaining protected areas and to combat the pollution of certain urban areas and watercourses. Today Burundi urgently appeals to the international community to strengthen its partnership in the national efforts we have already begun and in support of the programmes under way.

The implementation of Agenda 21 is in our mutual interest and is the common but differentiated responsibility of developed and developing countries. So, at the national and international levels, we must come up with and adopt innovative approaches to mobilizing financial resources in order to strive towards the Rio commitments, which are being renewed at this special session.

In conclusion, I would like to wish this special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations every success. I reaffirm Burundi's interest in international cooperation to protect the environment in order to achieve sustainable development in the world, because the survival of humankind depends on the survival of natural resources.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Land Management and the Environment of Burundi for his statement.

Mr. Samuel Bigawa, Minister of Land Management and the Environment of Burundi, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, Minister of State for Works and Housing of Nigeria.

The Honourable Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, Minister of State for Works and Housing of Nigeria, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Adamu (Nigeria): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, five years ago, stands out as a landmark event in addressing the global issues of environment and development. At that Conference, the international community gave voice and content to its collective will to cooperate by endorsing the principles of the Rio Declaration, as well as the objectives of Agenda 21, as an earnest expression of its intent to ensure the survival of humankind through sustainable development. UNCED established the linkage between socio-economic development and environmental protection as an effective policy implementation framework. It is for this reason that the international community must continue to see Agenda 21 as a comprehensive plan for global action.

Unfortunately, we are well aware that five years after the Rio Conference, international cooperation has waned and the political will to implement Agenda 21 has continued to recede, especially on the part of our partners in the developed world. It is the conviction of the Nigerian delegation that this session should not be an occasion to renegotiate Agenda 21, but in essence and in all objectivity, an opportunity to assess to what extent Member States have delivered on their commitments in line with our common but differentiated responsibilities and mobilize the relevant political will towards the full implementation of Agenda 21.

Appreciable efforts have been made at the national level to implement Agenda 21 in some developing countries. Nonetheless, for the majority of these countries, the current trend towards globalization of the world economy marginalizes developing countries in terms of the performance of their respective economies. Faced with fluctuating commodity prices, the heavy external debt burden and declining official development assistance, the implementation of Agenda 21 by developing countries, particularly those in Africa, has suffered immensely. We must say that the issue of external debt is inextricably linked with the capacity to pursue sustainable development. In this connection, we believe that the issues of trade and environment, access to the markets of the developed countries, direct foreign investment, access to environmentally sound technologies on concessional and preferential terms and official development assistance require concerted action by the international community.

My delegation believes that the pursuit of sustained economic growth and sustainable development are essentially the responsibility of national Governments. In this regard, Nigeria has launched a long-term development programme known as VISION 2010 — a vision of sustainable development and political stability. In this programme, the Nigerian Government has put in perspective its commitment to a people-centred development as the main thrust of its efforts towards poverty alleviation.

As a country in the throes of development and change, Nigeria continues to take steps to protect the environment and preserve its ecological balance. Our national report to this Assembly highlights the appreciable progress we have made in the implementation of Agenda 21. We have taken various initiatives to conserve and manage our natural resources, control deforestation, combat desertification, mitigate the effects of drought, promote sustainable human settlement and agriculture and conserve biological diversity. In this regard, Government has increased its ecological allocation from 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the Federation accounts. There is an additional provision based on the principle of derivation for solid minerals and oil producing communities. The Environmental Impact Assessment Decree promulgated in 1992 is being implemented to the letter for new development projects. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has also been strengthened and located in the Presidency with a Governing Council of Ministers to give it the political muscle for effectiveness. Every State of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, has an Environmental Protection Agency in place.

We have equally taken measures to ensure the integration of environmental concerns into development planning and decision-making, while efforts have also been made to ensure private sector involvement in issues of the environment. Government, in partnership with manufacturing industries and oil companies, now shares a joint commitment to develop environment-friendly measures aimed at improving the environment and welfare of all communities, including the oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

One other issue on which there is general agreement is that capacity-building is a prerequisite for sustainable development and this must be seen as an effort in cooperation rather than in competition. Countries should also see capacity building as an investment in human resource development. There is therefore the need for developed countries to be more supportive of the developing countries.

However, what has been evident in the implementation of Agenda 21 is an apparent withdrawal from the commitments agreed to in Rio. While we acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of those developed countries that have met the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product as official development assistance, there are a number among them which have reneged in fulfilling their commitments to the implementation of Agenda 21. Consequently, we see this trend as an unfortunate distortion of the spirit of partnership in the promotion of international cooperation for sustainable development. My delegation therefore believes that the developed countries should find ways and means of fulfilling their commitments to the provision of new and additional resources that are both adequate and predictable.

Regarding institutional arrangements for sustainable development within the ambit of Agenda 21, the Nigerian delegation believes that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should continue to be the catalyst for international efforts to protect the environment. UNEP should remain in its present location and indeed be strengthened in order to assume the institution's full responsibility and continue to play an appropriate role in policy guidance and coordination in global environmental issues. We also recommend that the Commission on Sustainable Development expand the ministerial participation of its high-level segment in order to stimulate the political will necessary for the implementation of Agenda 21.

As we review the implementation of Agenda 21 in line with the purpose and intent which gave birth to it, we must recognize that significant environmental problems remain deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of nations. This situation demands concrete commitment to partnership between the developed and developing countries if we are to protect the global environment and conserve the Earth's natural resources. The pattern of consumption of the developed economies is not sustainable. It therefore calls for a change. On the other hand, developing countries, while pursuing development, should be mindful of the impact of development on the environment.

We must also draw attention to the danger posed to the environment by the willing disposition of some industrial countries to export to developing countries their radioactive and toxic wastes. This is unacceptable. In our view, this special session of the General Assembly has a moral responsibility to call for the full implementation of the existing international instruments outlawing this practice.

Finally, my delegation believes that, after a lot of talking before and after the Rio Summit, the time has come for concrete action on the part of the international community so that our global environment may be preserved and development sustained for generations yet unborn.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of State for Works and Housing of Nigeria for his statement.

The Honourable Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, Minister of State for Works and Housing of Nigeria, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia.

Mr. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Gorbunovs (Latvia): The Rio Summit in 1992 was one of the first global events in which Latvia participated after the renewal of its independence. I had the honour of leading the Latvian delegation in Rio. The Rio Summit coincided with the first stages of Latvia's transition to a market economy, thus permitting the incorporation of the concepts of sustainable development in the very foundations of the transition.

Since the Rio Summit, Latvia has made a significant investment in environmental improvements. Latvia's key targets are roads, harbours and energy technologies. Latvia is proud to note, however, that 27 per cent of its total investments are aimed at improving the environment, especially through water management and sewage treatment. A serious unsolved problem is the clean-up of military sites, which will take tremendous time, money and adequate technology.

Latvia believes, as was recognized in Rio, that participation in regional processes is of the utmost importance. Currently, Latvia participates in one pan-European and two Baltic Sea region processes relating to sustainable development. An important consequence of this pan-European participation was the development and acceptance by the Government in 1995 of the National Environmental Policy Plan for Latvia. The plan contains a long-term environmental protection strategy that should lead to the integration of environmental considerations into the development of all sectors of the national economy.

The first of the two processes in the Baltic Sea region was initiated in September 1990 when the Baltic Sea Ministerial Conference adopted the Baltic Sea Declaration. The Declaration called for the establishment of a long-term action plan for the ecological restoration and preservation of the Baltic Sea. The finished plan identifies more than 100 "hot spots" in the Baltic Sea region. At present, Latvia is engaged in solving the problems caused by half of its 10 hot spots. In this regard, Latvia is grateful to the Nordic countries and to the international financial institutions that have assisted financially and helped to establish relevant financial mechanisms.

This successful cooperation was expanded in 1996, when the Heads of Government of the 11 countries belonging to the Baltic Sea Council, of which Latvia is currently the presiding country, and the President of the European Commission agreed to develop an Agenda 21 for the region, to be called Baltic 21. Baltic 21 emphasizes regional cooperation in solving environmental problems and moving towards sustainable development. It is believed that Baltic 21 could serve as an example of regional cooperation.

A second process in the Baltic Sea region, currently complementary to Baltic 21, is spatial or land-use planning. In 1992 the countries around the Baltic Sea agreed to prepare a long-term spatial development concept, "Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010", compatible with similar concepts elsewhere in Europe.

A subject of special interest to Latvia is forests, as forests cover almost one-half of the territory of Latvia and thus are environmentally and economically essential for Latvia. In its forest policy Latvia has taken into consideration the Forest Principles adopted in Rio and intends to follow the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. Nevertheless, Latvia believes that to ensure the sustainable development of Latvia's and the world's forests, two basic challenges must be met: to achieve a common understanding of the principles of sustainable forest management and to make a commitment to observe these principles. Therefore, Latvia supports proposals to start the negotiating process for a global convention on forests.

It is impossible to speak about sustainable development without mentioning competitiveness. Observing stricter environmental standards in one country alone could lead to decreased capacities of that country's economy in competition with other countries. The national policy of Latvia is the institution of strict environmental standards, and Latvia believes that strict and uniform standards, regionally and globally, are a precondition of equitable markets.

In conclusion, let me note that sustainability can be discerned in the national traditions of Latvians. Our traditions teach us to treasure nature as a most precious heritage to be passed whole to our children.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia for his statement.

Mr. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Begum Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister of the Environment and Forest of Bangladesh.

Begum Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister of the Environment and Forest of Bangladesh, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I bring with me greetings from Bangladesh for all the participants in this historic gathering and convey our best wishes for its success. We are happy to see you, Sir, at the helm.

The speakers before me have pointed out that little progress has been achieved in the five years since we adopted Agenda 21 in Rio. We need to give new dynamism to the Rio process at this session.

Let me briefly mention the position of my country in the implementation of Agenda 21 and also touch upon a number of issues that are of direct importance and relevance to Bangladesh and other developing countries.

Since Rio, Bangladesh has made sincere efforts to integrate environmental concerns in developmental decision-making and adapting policies, plans and strategies. Bangladesh has enacted laws for the protection of environment and set up "Green Courts" to handle violation of these laws, formulated the National Environment Management Action Plan, ratified almost all major international conventions, and established a national coordination mechanism for sustainable development — a National Environmental Committee headed by the Prime Minister.

Although we have undertaken far-reaching reform and adaptation measures, international support for these efforts in most cases was not forthcoming as committed to at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In this context, the SAARC Ministerial Declaration on implementation of Agenda 21 adopted in April is very relevant.

It is universally accepted that unless we eradicate poverty completely from the face of the earth, we would never succeed in taking care of the environment that sustains us. Any meaningful attempt to attain sustainable development must contain effective national programmes and strategies to eliminate poverty. We in Bangladesh know through experience that the twin goals of elimination of poverty and protection of environment could be achieved through implementation of effective microcredit programmes like our Grameen Bank. In this process, the empowerment of women is also ensured.

I draw the Assembly's attention to the Microcredit Summit that took place in Washington, D.C., last February. I am convinced that we would be much closer to a poverty-free world if we could implement its very practical plan of action. The countries of South Asia that are members of SAARC reiterated their commitment to poverty eradication at their recent summit in the Maldives.

My Government has noted with pleasure the recommendations of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) on the empowerment and full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society including decision-making process. Since the emergence of Bangladesh, women have been playing an important role in the governing of the State; two women leaders heading the Government during this decade. Women's participation in the Parliament has registered an increase over the years. The present Government, headed by Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has adopted for the first time a National Women's Development Policy aimed at the equality and empowerment of women in political, social, administrative and economic spheres. We have also ensured greater involvement of women in environmental programmes.

We sincerely hope that this special session will be instrumental in mobilizing the political will of the international community for the effective implementation of Agenda 21. Countries like Bangladesh, with a strong national commitment to sustainable development, need full support of the international community to their efforts.

We do not want sterile speeches here. We want action spurred by sincere and serious commitment to Agenda 21.

I would like to highlight a number of specific concerns that must be addressed on a priority basis:

The developing countries, especially the least developed ones, have been marginalized in the global trading system due to many constraints. Complex environmental requirements make these constraints more difficult. Technical assistance must be extended on a preferential basis to these countries to enable them to prevent and reverse further marginalization.

Recommendations of the expert group meeting on the implementation of special measures in favour of least developed countries under Agenda 21 need to be endorsed at this special session.

Climate change and the consequent rise in sea level would increase the vulnerability of small island nations and countries with high population densities. A one-metre sea level rise would lead to the loss of large segments of the land territories of quite a few countries, including Bangladesh. Adequate environmental measures should be enacted so that such a catastrophe is prevented.

Environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes is of great importance for proper health and environmental protection. Developing countries require technical assistance for that purpose.

Fresh water was given a key position in Agenda 21. We are concerned that the coming decades will pose serious water problems for the world. Fresh water supply and management need our top-priority attention and action. In Bangladesh, and also reportedly in parts of China and India, possible overexploitation of ground water has led to arsenic contamination in tube-well water, posing serious health hazards. This emerging problem has the potential to cause serious damage to present and future generations if it is not addressed now.

The development of forests, with a special focus on social forestry, should receive our particular attention. Bangladesh has the world's largest mangrove forest; it needs protection. We are encouraged that our Prime Minister herself took part this week in the aerial spreading of seeds to build a green belt in the coastal areas following the recent cyclone disaster.

No global agenda can be successfully implemented without adequate financial resources, both national and international. This matter should therefore elicit a serious commitment at this session.

Civil society, including the private sector, has a key role in the implementation of Agenda 21 and therefore needs to be involved fully in the process.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment and Forest of Bangladesh for her statement.

Begum Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister of the Environment and Forest of Bangladesh, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor now to His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Bathily, Minister of the Environment and Nature Conservation of Senegal.

Mr. Abdoulaye Bathily, Minister of the Environment and Nature Conservation of Senegal, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Bathily (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): The Rio summit was a symbol of the intention of the international community to set human civilization on a new course for the end of the twentieth century. The historic decisions taken at that unprecedented historic conference aimed at reorganizing production and consumption patterns according to a rationale ensuring solidarity between present and future generations in the context of a renewed partnership among nations. Never before had the concerns of the international community been marked by so generous and promising an approach.

The Rio Conference seemed to give momentum to a new ethic for the behaviour of nations and for international relations, and to proclaim new paradigms based on the concept of common but differentiated responsibility, in the light of the plight of our planet, which has been so sorely wounded and bruised by the irrational management of the past.

In other words, it aimed at finding ways and means to strike a true balance between present and future economic, social and ecological needs on the one hand, and laying the foundations for a world partnership based on shared understanding of needs and interests with a view to attaining sustainable development on the other.

Five years after Rio, there is no doubt that significant progress has been made, for example in terms of awareness of the negative impact of world environmental degradation and of the need to incorporate the environmental dimension in any approach to development policy.

But it is quite clear today from the relevant Secretariat documents and the statements made by so many delegations at this session that the Rio commitments are still essentially at the stage of declarations of intent. The harvest has not yielded its promised blossoms because national selfishness has prevailed over high-mindedness and solidarity.

No one can deny that the negative trends of these last decades of the twentieth century are slow to reverse. These include growing poverty, the marginalization of hundreds of millions of people, the precarious state of natural resources, the degradation of biological diversity, the destruction of forests, worsening pollution, rampant desertification, and so many other examples. The elimination of these scourges, which threaten the survival of us all, requires decisive joint action centred on Agenda 21, our collective strategy document. None can shirk their own particular responsibilities, but at the same time it must be understood that individual success will be impossible without a common commitment.

For its part, Senegal has kept full faith with the spirit of Rio and the resultant commitments. That is why, as a party to the three Conventions that emerged from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, my country has taken a series of actions to implement them nationally and locally, as well as in conjunction with its regional and subregional partners in Africa.

At the institutional level, the establishment of organs to provide coordination, incentive and motivation, such as our National Commission on Sustainable Development and our Supreme Council for Natural Resources and the Environment, reflects the desire of the Government of Senegal fully to integrate the elements of sustainable development into its national development effort.

In the next few weeks my country will adopt a national plan of action for the environment, which has been drawn up in its entirety with the full participation of all sectors of the population. Likewise, the process of decentralization is reflected in the entry into force in January 1997 of the law on regionalization, which is intended, *inter alia*, to give local communities the necessary competence and tools to promote management policies for natural resources and the environment. Of course, much remains to be done if we are to achieve our national goals. But with the political will of the Government and the growing awareness of the population at the grassroots level, we are confident that we will be able to forge ahead.

For Senegal, the current special session of the General Assembly must be the occasion on which we renew the covenant made in Rio. It should result in a forthright commitment to translate into actions the noble intentions set down in Agenda 21. This session should conclude with the firm resolve to give a new thrust to the process of implementing the international conventions of Rio by giving them equal priority. In this context, we regret the lack of progress in negotiations on the Convention to Combat Desertification, especially with regard to the resources and financial machinery required for its implementation. We believe that there is a serious risk that this instrument, which is of paramount importance for Africa, will be reduced to the status of

poor relation of the conventions of the Rio generation. This concern was forcefully expressed at the meeting of African Environment Ministers held last March in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, just as it was recalled here by President Robert Mugabe, the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

This is also the time to reiterate our concern for the promotion of measures that will make it possible to contribute to the management, conservation and ecologically sound exploitation of forests. We welcome the very positive work that has been done in this area by the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. There is no doubt that its proposals, which are before us, will be examined with the greatest possible attention.

Senegal is aware that any work for sustainable development is above all a national responsibility, requiring in particular the definition and application of sound macroeconomic policies based on transparency, respect for the rule of law, democracy, social justice and the participation of all sectors of society. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the essential role of international cooperation in the implementation of the commitments contained in Agenda 21. In this context, the steady decrease of official development assistance gives us little ground for optimism, particularly in the light of the new and additional financial resources that will be required to implement the objectives laid down in Rio.

This point must be forcefully made: sustainable development is in danger of becoming empty words for many countries if domestic efforts are not backed up by a resolute commitment on the part of the international community to promote genuine world partnership for development. The settlement of the debt crisis and fair remuneration for primary commodities proceed from the same imperative for solidarity and interdependence. The international community can live up to its commitments if it proves that it has genuine political will, an attitude that goes beyond national egoism and short-sighted initiatives.

Merely by rationalizing our working methods and procedures and by ending waste in a number of activities we can find important resources that could then be channelled towards improving the quality of life for all the people on our planet.

Meeting these challenges is well within the realm of the possible if, after an honest and critical diagnosis of the progress that has been made, we agree to proceed resolutely towards the specific implementation of the commitments we have made. Then and only then will we deserve the gratitude of the generations of the third millennium.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment and Nature Conservation of Senegal for his statement.

Mr. Abdoulaye Bathily, Minister of the Environment and Nature Conservation of Senegal, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José António Monteiro, Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Environment of Cape Verde.

Mr. José António Monteiro, Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Environment of Cape Verde, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Monteiro (Cape Verde) (*spoke in Portuguese; interpretation from French text furnished by the delegation*): The central theme of this important meeting, environment and development, has acquired great significance as this century draws to a close and is becoming increasingly important. In this context, the Rio Conference galvanized people at the levels of government, international institutions and social groups.

Five years have passed, but all the major principles in the Rio Declaration are still valid and are the mainstay of our search for sustainable development. It is appropriate to underline here that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities within a global partnership is indispensable — crucial, even — for eliminating environmental degradation and the exhaustion of resources.

We note the continuation at the global level of two major traditional constraints on sustainability: on the one hand, population growth, and on the other, patterns of production and consumption that are not adapted to the realities of today. However, while the control of demographic growth factors is progressing in a relatively satisfactory manner, it is becoming necessary to tackle the issue of production and consumption, however thorny it may be.

Cape Verde strongly reiterates its commitment to Agenda 21. Through its programme of national action it is engaged in the formidable task of reversing the degradation of the environment and its natural resources.

National and regional social and environmental policies will be fully harmonized with our economic policies.

We stress the fact that our country is a small island State, with consequent serious and complex problems and environmental vulnerability that hinder our development. We reaffirm that it is essential and urgent to meet all the conditions to ensure the effective implementation of the Barbados Plan of Action.

In this context, we have defined our main objectives as, *inter alia*, the protection of the sea and the coastal areas and their respective resources; the protection of our natural land resources, particularly soil and water, as well as biodiversity, to ensure the rational management and sustainable exploitation of these resources.

To this end, and in close relation to the directions and recommendations established at the Rio Conference, and in subsequent international conventions which we have ratified, several programmes are at various stages of implementation. Given the realities that we face, our priority and most advanced actions relate primarily to forestation and water resources. Forestation, which is considered by all the people of Cape Verde as a matter of survival, is a challenge with which we have been dealing in a positive manner. Over the past 20 years the forested area of our country has been increased more than 20 times, which corresponds to one fifth of the surface area of our country.

Water, the source of life and the engine of development, is a scarce commodity and is duly being used in accordance with our master plan, our main priorities being to meet drinking water requirements and to ensure the rational use of water and environmental sanitation.

We can see some very striking imbalances between and within countries, despite efforts undertaken in the light of Agenda 21. The effect of this is increased poverty, unemployment and disease, which accentuate the continuing degradation of ecosystems and of human well-being.

We cannot rest in our war against poverty. Poverty is the thorough negation of sustainability and a serious obstacle to qualitative development. Eliminating poverty is therefore an imperative and provides powerful leverage for the implementation of Agenda 21. For large sectors of the population in many societies, daily survival takes up all available energy.

Our ability to eliminate the socio-ecological scourge of poverty, as was spelt out in Agenda 21, is still highly dependent on official development assistance, particularly in the least developed countries, where external investment is not yet a real alternative.

Along the same lines, Cape Verde faces various constraints in implementing the Rio commitments. These relate primarily to nature, which has afflicted us with major cyclical droughts that have significantly affected our socio-economic and ecological fabric, but we also face financial, technological and institutional constraints.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we face the challenge of meeting fundamental human rights, such as access to food, health, housing and education, in order to achieve sustainable development. This will require the mobilization of resources not commonly available to developing countries.

We note that the United Nations Environment Programme has an important role to play at the global level in resolving environmental issues. We also believe that measures to strengthen that body must be introduced quickly so that it can become more effective.

We would like to emphasize the mandate of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, which is currently being chaired by Cape Verde. This is particularly important in the light of the objectives of Agenda 21. We would like to recall its two major policy programmes, designed to combat drought and desertification and to conserve natural resources, as well as the programme on food security. These, together with training, will have a significant impact on socio-economic and ecological conditions in the subregion.

The establishment of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries last year made possible the establishment of an inter-ministerial conference on the environment. We hope it will be an important forum for the seven member countries to reach agreement and cooperate in implementing Agenda 21.

We trust that this special session, by dealing with the issues and making recommendations, will produce credible hopes for the establishment of mechanisms that will make it possible to preserve the Earth so that we can leave it in a condition that will allow future generations to enjoy well-being.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Environment of Cape Verde for his statement.

Mr. José António Monteiro, Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Environment of Cape Verde, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Atef Ebeid, Minister of Public Enterprise Sector, Administrative Development and Environmental Affairs of Egypt.

His Excellency Mr. Atef Ebeid, Minister of Public Enterprise Sector, Administrative Development and Environmental Affairs of Egypt, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ebeid (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to represent my country, Egypt, twice in five years at two international meetings held to achieve a better life for humanity. The first meeting, which took place in Rio, has undoubtedly led to the achievement of some of our aspirations. The second meeting, which is taking place this week, will hopefully lead to the fulfilment of more of our hopes.

There were differences of opinion in Rio on priorities and sources of finance for national, regional and global projects. However, there was agreement on the risks and the challenges that we all face. There was also agreement on the imperative to confront these challenges and to achieve tangible progress in containing the risks that we face. We also agreed to continue the dialogue and pursue our common endeavour to protect our natural resources and even increase them.

I would like to mention some of the achievements our world has witnessed since Rio.

First, the number of countries interested in effectively protecting the environment has increased.

Secondly, a number of international agreements were concluded, notably those on biological diversity, climate change and combating desertification. The number of parties acceding to such agreements and conventions increases every year.

Thirdly, the interest of international and regional development institutions in the environment has increased. Consequently, the financial resources they have made available for environmental projects have also increased.

Fourthly, the amount of experience and the number of experts able to formulate environmental plans and programmes has also increased.

Fifthly, many countries have accelerated the pace of making their environmental laws more effective.

Sixthly, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that popular interest in environmental questions has also increased. This was reflected in the growth of the number of non-governmental organizations that were established to protect the environment and in the inclusion of environmental questions on the agendas of political parties and in the platforms of their candidates seeking to win seats on representative councils.

In spite of all these significant accomplishments, we still feel that, given the magnitude of the responsibilities involved, the enormity of environmental problems and our ever more ambitious goals, we have barely started down the road. We face immense challenges in both the developing and developed worlds. We must agree to meet these challenges quickly.

In our opinion, the following are the most important of these challenges and the ones that should be the object of the greatest amount of our concern and time.

First, we must provide clean water for the millions around the world who are still drinking polluted water and who face death or chronic diseases that negate or diminish their ability to work.

Secondly, we must enlarge green areas, particularly tree-covered lands. We hope that we can all agree to protect what we have. However, let us try a more positive approach. Let us replace each tree chopped down with several others. This can be done through an agreement on the number of trees that should be planted annually in countries that have enough water and land, which are the two basic elements for the growth of tree coverage.

Thirdly, we have to accelerate the development of the technology necessary to control and reduce the impact of activities that affect climate and, hence, our natural resources.

Fourthly, our means for dealing with environmental disasters on land or at sea are either inadequate or non-existent, and we therefore have to provide technologies for those who need them. The danger of such disaster is increasing day by day.

Fifthly, with regard to the continued increase in world population, we all know that over the last 10 years the population rose by 1 billion and that most of that increase was in the developing countries. Also, we all know that we can control this increase through more socio-economic development, particularly in the education and health sectors.

If we are to make concrete progress in these five areas, we will need money, know-how and experience. The most important of these, and the scarcest, is money.

Allow me to make a specific proposal that would deal, in principle, with this matter. We suggest, as a way of providing additional resources for facing environmental challenges, that we agree to establish a global fund for the environment to be financed by adding just one dollar to the cost of every ticket used to travel abroad, be it a journey by land, air or sea. This fund, should it be established, would provide us with a new and renewable source of revenue that could provide an estimated $1 billion a year. This proposal would have the following advantages.

First, every county in the world would participate in and contribute to this fund and its resources, each according to its own ability. The number of travellers from developed countries certainly surpasses the number from the developing world.

Secondly, it would represent an additional source of revenue but would not come from countries' annual budgets. Consequently, it would not be affected by the policies we all apply in order to contain annual budget deficits.

Thirdly, it would be easy to collect the funds, since this could be done by a limited number of agencies in the transport sector in every country.

Fourthly, it would guarantee a renewable source of revenue that would increase in step with higher levels of development in the world.

Finally, much has been said, and there have been many debates and long meetings. It was hoped that all this would lead to a minimal agreement on effective action to deal with the situation that we have agreed to change. Let us reach a speedy agreement. Let our actions speak louder than our words.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Public Enterprise Sector, Administrative Development and Environmental Affairs of Egypt for his statement.

Mr. Atef Ebeid, Minister of Public Enterprise Sector, Administrative Development and Environmental Affairs of Egypt, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Elizabeth Thompson, Minister of Health and the Environment of Barbados.

The Honourable Elizabeth Thompson, Minister of Health and the Environment of Barbados, was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Thompson (Barbados): The delegation of Barbados would like to associate itself fully with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by the Ambassador of Tanzania and on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States the one to be made by the Ambassador of Samoa.

Five years ago at Rio, the United Nations launched a global partnership to reinforce the linkages between environment and development, to arrest the deterioration of the global environment and to preserve the wonder and well-being of planet Earth for future generations.

Since Rio, numerous conventions have been signed. While there are some positive achievements to which we may point, there is a long way to go yet, particularly for small States. The question before us remains, how do poor countries meet all these commitments without access to additional financial resources and appropriate technical expertise? Conventions and meetings will not make the required changes. Developing countries need new and additional funding to live up to the agreements which we have all made. The reality is that without such support, degradation of the environment in developing countries will continue. We share one Earth. All of us are affected by the same waters, climatic conditions and ozone layer. Hence, the environmental problems of the developing world are, in reality, those of the developed world.

The Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in

April 1994, which my country had the honour to host, and the Barbados Programme of Action which it endorsed, addressed the vulnerabilities which not only hamper our economic and social development, but threaten the very survival of States such as my own.

Despite commitments made at Rio and Barbados, the degradation of the global environment which sustains us all continues. Hundreds of species are disappearing, the destruction of the world's forests proceeds apace, and natural disasters are becoming even more frequent. Even more worrisome is the fact that more than 1 billion people still languish in absolute poverty, which is both a cause and an effect of environmental degradation. The warning of Mr. Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank, that man sometimes forgives but nature never does is a most pertinent reminder and a call for the nurturing of our natural resources. This special session must examine the factors which have hampered progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. It must address the question of unfulfilled commitments if the integrity of this global initiative is to be preserved and strengthened. We must speak to the cause of our common failure to realize our objectives. We must address the crisis in financial resources for developing countries and recommit ourselves to urgent action to reverse these negative trends. Industrialized societies must move with greater dispatch to ensure that industrial activity is predicated on sound environmental considerations.

Protection of the oceans and seas is a major priority for small island developing States. For Barbados, the Caribbean Sea is a lifeline resource of inestimable value. The recently concluded Caribbean/USA summit called on participating States to work towards obtaining international agreement in making the Caribbean Sea an environmentally sustainable zone.

The Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States has been described as the first concerted attempt by a group of historically marginalized States to define their problems, highlight their special characteristics and devise specific programmes of action for small island developing States. The report of the Commission on Sustainable Development reflects that considerable efforts are being made at the national and regional levels in its implementation. The Commission has recommended a full review of the small island developing States Programme of Action in 1999, at the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly. Barbados welcomes this decision and looks forward to new impetus from this special session as we embark on the preparatory process leading up to the special session on small island developing States.

Barbados lays great store by its success in the use of solar energy for water heating. We have established mechanisms for poverty alleviation and programmes for water resource management, a human resource development strategy is being implemented, a national waste management strategy has been developed and the construction of sewers for our coastal areas is under way. We are seeking to control pollution, make our island green, better manage our marine environment and move generally towards policies in tune with sustainable development. Our national Commission on Sustainable Development is hosting a series of national consultations to create, at every level of our society, consciousness and partnerships in sustainable development. It is our goal that by the twenty-first century, Barbados should be recognized among small island developing States as the model for sustainable development.

Let us leave this special session on the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21 with a renewed commitment to this global partnership. Let us redouble our efforts to meet the environmental goals which were set and endorsed at Rio and at Barbados.

Our new impetus must have as its nucleus two things: first, national programmes based on a recognition that genuine economic development can be achieved only if it is based on environmental protection; and secondly, the very clear understanding that all measures which we take to protect the environment are in fact investments in the future of the Earth and all its people, for, in the words of one philosopher, we do not inherit this world from our forefathers — in a very real sense, we borrow it from our children.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Health and the Environment of Barbados for her statement.

The Honourable Elizabeth Thompson, Minister of Health and the Environment of Barbados, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Syeda Abida Hussain, Federal Minister for Environment, Local Government and Rural Development, Population Welfare, Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Pakistan.

Ms. Syeda Abida Hussain, Federal Minister for Environment, Local Government and Rural Development, Population Welfare, Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Pakistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Hussain (Pakistan): On behalf of the Pakistan delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, and the other members of the Bureau for their election to this important special session of the General Assembly.

Pakistan had the honour to serve as spokesperson of the G-77 and China at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992. We are therefore especially interested in the success of this session, which, we hope, will provide an impetus to the implementation of the commitments made at Rio.

We must objectively assess our performance during the five years since the Earth Summit. The Rio Declaration proclaimed that the sole purpose of development is the promotion of human welfare. It affirmed economic growth, social equity and environmental protection as the essential components of sustainable development. To achieve these objectives, Agenda 21 called for a global partnership predicated on common but differentiated responsibilities.

Following Rio, a number of positive developments have taken place. At the global level, a growing body of international environmental laws and norms has emerged. The United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies, as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have been undergoing a process of "greening". The United Nations Institute for Training and Research, which Pakistan has the honour to chair, has also played an important role in promoting the goals of the Rio Summit.

At the national level, scores of countries have set up ministries and other institutions devoted to the achievement of sustainable development. Legal and economic instruments have been evolved to rationalize the utilization of natural resources. Governments and civil society are working hand in hand to conserve and develop resources and enhance access to social services.

Despite economic and financial difficulties, Pakistan has taken significant steps for the protection and conservation of the environment and sustainable development. A comprehensive national environmental law has been prepared. The participation of non-governmental organizations, local communities and special groups is being encouraged. Development projects are now subjected to environmental impact assessments.

While rejoicing at the positive trends, we must admit failures and inadequacies. We must acknowledge that the successes are dwarfed by the growing threats to the environment in most parts of the world.

The situation in the developing world is particularly alarming. Scores of developing countries face the threat of swelling the ranks of the least developed countries. Growing poverty, stagnating economies, burgeoning populations, fragile institutions, diversion of meagre resources towards debt-servicing and declining export earnings due to restricted access to markets have led to shrinking human welfare and deteriorating environment. To give a telling example: More than half of Pakistan's revenues will be expended on debt servicing during the current financial year.

Poverty and environmental degradation are deeply intertwined. The socio-economic stagnation of the developing countries has perpetuated the unsustainable exploitation of all natural resources, including land, soil, water and forests. The eradication of poverty is therefore not an ethical imperative or a humanitarian gesture, but an investment in global sustainability.

For a clear manifestation of our commitment to the achievement of the goal of sustainable development in the next century, we must take immediate steps to arrest and reverse the current negative trends. The guiding principles as well as actions are contained in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. These landmark decisions were reaffirmed and elaborated by the subsequent global conferences of the 1990s.

We need to muster the political will to implement the Rio consensus. Special attention needs to be paid to the creation of an enabling international economic environment, the eradication of poverty, the availability of financial resources and the transfer of environmentally sound technology. Developed countries must fulfil their pledges in this regard.

The private sector, civil society and information technology have emerged as the three powerful engines of global change and sustainable development today. The problems of sustainable development were identified five years ago. We are now in a phase of seeking solutions. Solutions require vision, innovation and leadership. The

private sector has all the essential credentials to actualize the goals of sustainable development. With its eco-efficient leadership, it can steer us to a sustainable future. Non-governmental organizations have made a remarkable contribution to the development and implementation of Agenda 21. On this occasion, we must reaffirm our commitment to a more meaningful participation of all actors of civil society in achieving a transition to sustainability.

At the United Nations, some historical initial steps have been taken to ensure that information technology is given the importance that it deserves as an essential tool and a force multiplier for achieving true development. The United Nations must draw upon the vast expertise offered by the private sector, academic institutions and financial institutions available as a result of the information revolution.

The outcome of this special session will decisively shape our responses to the perennial and emerging threats to sustainable development. We should pledge to apply all available resources to save the future of this planet and the destiny of mankind. I hope that our decisions and recommendations will match the scale and magnitude of the challenges that we face.

The Acting President: I thank the Federal Minister for Environment, Local Government and Rural Development, Population Welfare, Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Pakistan for her statement.

Ms. Syeda Abida Hussain, Federal Minister for Environment, Local Government and Rural Development, Population Welfare, Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Pakistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Dato' Law Hieng Ding, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Malaysia.

Dato' Law Hieng Ding, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Malaysia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ding (Malaysia): We are pleased to note that this meeting clearly places environmental security on the international agenda at the highest level of government.

The statements made by the Heads of State and Government have described the progress we have made in implementing Agenda 21 as falling below Rio expectations. We are equally disappointed and concur with this assessment.

We need to understand why we have failed and to use the lessons learnt to chart new directions which will take us into the new millennium.

The Rio process underlined the importance of the precautionary principle of preventive action and its important linkages to sustainable development. However, the status of the environmental health of our planet today appears bleaker when we consider that unsustainable trends have worsened.

We are particularly concerned that poverty continues unabated; financial resources have taken a downturn; the transfer of environmental technologies has not materialized; human-induced climate change has increased; trade and investments have become more difficult for developing countries; and globalization has unleashed new threats to sustainable development.

Like other developing countries, Malaysia has met its international obligations and commitments largely through its own resources and efforts. But this has not been easy for us. Development is a priority for a developing country like Malaysia. With limited domestic resources, meeting international commitments puts additional stress on our capacity to address development priorities.

Malaysia's effort to protect the environment predates the Rio Summit. We have established clear policies and programmes to deal with environmental matters at the national, regional and global levels. We are proud that forests cover more than 50 per cent of the country. And if we take into account agricultural plantations, forests and trees cover over 70 per cent of the country. We are also regarded as one of the few mega-diversity countries in the world, and we pay particular attention to the management of our biodiversity resources.

Malaysia is also one of the leading countries in the world in implementing the rapid reduction of ozone-depleting substances. As a rapidly developing country, we are fortunate not to be dependent on official development assistance. We believe that the success we have achieved and the experiences we have gained bestows a responsibility on us to help others. We have

implemented a modest technical cooperation programme, which was launched several years ago. Through this programme we have rendered training and other assistance in natural-resource and environmental management to developing countries, especially countries in Asia and Africa.

The hurdles to the achievement of the goals we set in Rio are clear. They are: inadequate means of implementation; unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; and, above all, the lack of genuine partnership between developed and developing countries.

Mobilizing national efforts and domestic resources and promoting a greater awareness of the environment is obviously necessary for sustainable development. But this is not adequate to deal with the many issues and challenges before us which are global in nature. Our experience over the past five years clearly shows that international assistance and cooperation is vital to achieving the goals of Agenda 21. We therefore need to begin anew by breaking away from the North-South divide, which has stalled so many important issues at the negotiation table. Our future cooperation must be based on a genuine partnership of shared values and common destiny.

It is thus important for this meeting to issue a strong political statement reaffirming our commitments, especially to the full implementation of Agenda 21. Our message should be clear and precise for all to understand that our commitments are for real action and that the well-being of peoples and of future generations remains in the centre of our deliberations.

We support the sectors identified for future programmes of work. We urge that biodiversity also be given priority of implementation. In the light of the rapid loss of flora and fauna, we need to act quickly before it is too late to reverse this trend.

Finance is perhaps the most tangible indicator of the commitment of developed countries to the entire process of promoting sustainable development. We are encouraged to note the positive statements made by a few countries with respect to increasing their development assistance. The voice of a few is, however, insufficient. It is important to send a clear signal that there will be a reversal of the negative trend in official development assistance flows. The developed countries need to forge greater consensus in this area. Unless this is done, we see the risk of many issues being stalled in this meeting and also in the years ahead.

In addition to official development assistance, new and additional financial resources need to be mobilized. In this regard, the Expert Group on Finance has proposed several innovative financing mechanisms. We urge that the work of this Group be carried forward through an appropriate intergovernmental process.

Like finance, the transfer of environmentally sound technologies is crucial to the success of Agenda 21. While we note that our experts are discussing this matter, we would urge that the TRIPs agreement in the World Trade Organization (WTO) should be reviewed to facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. In this regard we would also like to urge support for the World Solar Programme, as announced by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe. We believe that this programme, which seeks to promote technologies related to the use of renewable and environmentally friendly energies, can make an important contribution to sustainable development.

The meeting in Kyoto later this year has attracted worldwide attention. We share the deep concern of small island States over rising ocean levels, which threaten their existence. The credibility of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has been diluted by the lack of commitment by some countries. Developing countries expect that industrial countries as a whole will adhere to fixed targets of greenhouse gas emission reduction according to a timetable. We welcome the statement by European Union countries that they will commit to substantive reductions by the year 2010. The Kyoto meeting will provide the opportunity for other industrial countries to do likewise.

The rapid globalization process threatens to overwhelm both environment and development goals. Unbridled liberalization and globalization can have a negative impact on sustainable development. We suggest that further trends in this regard should be monitored closely. Our goal should be to devise strategies to direct globalization towards economic, social and environmental sustainability.

We would like to see the strengthening of the role and work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with a clear definition of responsibilities. The CSD should remain the premier body at the policy level. It should strengthen its ties with other relevant United Nations agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO in order to ensure that these institutions are in tune

with the global efforts towards sustainable development. UNEP should remain the international body to mobilize action and should therefore be strengthened.

We support the adoption of a comprehensive convention covering all types of forests. Our experience since Rio suggests that a legal framework is now timely. Voluntary compliance with forest management principles has not prevented degradation and loss of forests. We need more binding arrangements for the sustainable management of forests. We believe that this can be done within a time-bound schedule.

In conclusion, we hope that this special session will provide the needed political push to take the hard decisions required for moving the Rio process forward. I am confident that together we can achieve the political consensus necessary for this purpose. Let us show the political will to make this a reality.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Malaysia for his statement.

Dato' Law Hieng Ding, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Malaysia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to The Honourable Martin Aliker, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda.

The Honourable Martin Aliker, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Aliker (Uganda): The delegation of Uganda fully associates itself with the statements made by the delegations of the United Republic of Tanzania and of Zimbabwe, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and the Organization of African Unity respectively.

In adopting Agenda 21, all countries undertook to implement development policies and actions that safeguard the environment for the benefit of the present generation and posterity. Agenda 21 was thus a compact whose implementation was premised on a global partnership and a shared responsibility which recognized varying capabilities, means and obligations within and between countries.

Within this framework, Uganda has undertaken a number of measures to implement Agenda 21 and the other relevant outcomes of major international conferences. Our National Environment Management Authority is in place to oversee and advise on all matters regarding environmental protection. Our National Environment Action Plan is operational. Projects on environmentally sound energy are being implemented.

Through schemes such as the Poverty Alleviation Programme and the Community Action Programme, my Government is giving priority attention to the problem of poverty, which in our case is both a major cause and a major effect of environmental degradation. We have also introduced the Universal Primary Education Programme as one way of addressing the problem of poverty in the long term. We express our appreciation to all countries and international organizations that have extended support to us, and we appeal for continued support, as well as for additional support from others with the necessary means.

Uganda shares the concern that has been raised over the growing erosion of commitments under Agenda 21 and of those undertaken at other relevant international conferences, such as commitments on financial resources, environmentally sound technology transfer and institutional arrangements for implementation and monitoring. These have remained either unimplemented or underimplemented.

An enabling international environment conducive to economic growth and development, particularly of developing countries, is necessary for our countries to be able to generate the resources and capacity we need for addressing poverty and other environmental problems. For Uganda, this is particularly urgent in the areas of increased investment and export trade and enhanced debt relief. Any ongoing discussion on these issues in other forums should not give rise to new forms of conditionality or obligations which are inimical to our development.

Uganda is also concerned that, despite commitments undertaken under Agenda 21, environmental degradation is continuing unchecked through, *inter alia*, polluting emissions, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, hazardous and radioactive wastes and the unsustainable use of renewable resources. We urge particularly the industrialized countries to take urgent measures to stem and reverse these unfortunate phenomena. In this regard, the industrialized countries should adopt legally binding commitments on the

timetable and level of reductions of their emissions of greenhouse gases.

We take note of the suggestion to commence negotiations on a convention on forests. However, in our view, the outcome of such negotiations should not compromise the sovereign rights of States over their natural resources.

There is an urgent need to formulate concerted approaches to integrated water resource development and management in order to provide for an overall umbrella for coordination and cooperation at all levels. In this regard, we take note with interest of the proposal on the establishment of a world water council. Uganda, for its part, is moving away from a centralized system of water management to a community-based system where those directly affected participate in decision making. We have in place a water action plan and a water statute aimed at facilitating flexible and coherent water resources management at all levels.

In the context of East African cooperation, modalities are being worked out for the efficient and sustainable utilization of Lake Victoria. However, water hyacinth remains a major problem negatively affecting both marine ecology and water transport on the lake. We call for urgent support to address this problem.

As we approach the end of this round of the review of what has been done since Rio, our own evaluation is that there have been fewer successes than failures. Meanwhile, environmental degradation continues its accelerated upward trend. For us, from the developing South, the "specialness" of this session will be recognized only if we all move forward, beyond a mere reaffirmation of the commitments, to operationalization of Agenda 21. This is the only way to assure present and future generations of a sound resource base for their existence.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda for his statement.

The Honourable Martin Aliker, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Chairman of the delegation of Samoa, who will speak on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

Mr. Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Chairman of the delegation of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Slade (Samoa): I have the honour, in my capacity as Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States, to speak on behalf of the 42 countries members of the Alliance, the majority of which are represented at this special session.

Let me say that we associate ourselves fully with the statement delivered earlier in the week by the Republic of Tanzania as Chairman of the Group of 77, speaking on behalf of that Group and China.

It bears repetition that, for developing countries, the implementation of sustainable development policies requires the commitment and investment of considerable additional financial resources. We must therefore continue to insist in 1997 as we did in 1992 on the need to identify ways and means of providing new and additional financial resources for the implementation of the policies and programmes which we seek so readily to propagate.

A critical test of the seriousness of our rededication to the implementation of Agenda 21 in 1997 will be the extent to which we can obtain a firmer commitment from developed countries to reverse the decline in official aid flows and to reach the accepted United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product, and to replenish and significantly increase the level of the Global Environment Facility funds.

Our constituency welcomes the decision of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development that provides for the modalities for the review of the Programme of Action of the United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Barbados in 1994. The Barbados Conference was the first major conference on sustainable development to take place after Rio. We believe that one of the notable achievements in the follow-up of the Earth Summit, and the articulation of the global partnership for sustainable development, has been the increased recognition that has been given to the special needs of small island developing States.

The Barbados Programme of Action stands today as a commitment on the part of the international community and the United Nations system to support small island developing States in their efforts at sustainable development, in the context of the implementation of

Agenda 21. It is the earnest hope of the AOSIS countries that the review process of this special session will serve to invigorate and strengthen the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, not only on the part of the small island States themselves, but also, and more especially, on the part of the international community as a whole. We therefore look forward to the full support of the international community when the review takes place in 1999.

The health and protection of the atmosphere is a first priority for States members of AOSIS, and we will continue to be actively engaged in the international negotiations. Climate change threatens the life force of our islands and our communities. We make virtually no contribution to the emissions of greenhouse gases which cause the problem. We therefore look to those who are principally responsible, the industrialized countries, for the most urgent and effective action.

We are not unaware of the difficulties and the uncertainties. But the evidence is overwhelming, and we would submit that the problem of climate change calls for immediate strengthening of the commitments of industrialized countries — annex I commitments — in concrete terms within specific reduction targets and time frames. There are clear benefits for early action, including the taking of "no regrets" actions. We have absolutely no doubt that delay will compound the difficulties for the future. For small island States, the precautionary principle is an ecological and moral imperative. Our very strong contention is that there is a clear and demonstrated need for the taking of precautionary measures now. Given the global and long-term nature of the problem, we also need to say that consideration must be given to appropriate additional actions which all countries, developed and developing, must take if we are to avoid the likely irreversible and dangerous consequences for the global climate system for the future.

Specific actions will need to be determined by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at their meeting in Kyoto later this year. It is essential, in the opinion of AOSIS, that this special session should provide the basis for strong and effective decisions to be taken in Kyoto. Our submission in the AOSIS draft protocol for a 20 per cent cut in carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005 is well known and long-standing. We believe that a target in this range remains credible and is subject only to the will of annex I countries to accept and achieve such a reduction.

May I say at this juncture that AOSIS welcomes the specific emissions reductions targets proposed by the European Union for the year 2010, and more recently their target for the year 2005. Leadership on such a serious global issue is expected and warranted, and we applaud the European Union.

We regard the links between energy and the economic and environmental issues as vital in the context of sustainable development, and we welcome the focus put on these issues during the preparations for this special session. We think greater attention must also be paid in this review process to the importance of developing all aspects of sustainable, clean and renewable energy programmes.

Increased international cooperation is essential to assist developing countries, especially the more vulnerable like small island States, to move to sustainable energy paths with the least risk of impacting our environment. To this end, AOSIS strongly favours the promotion of research, development and use of renewable energies, with the concrete and affirmative support of our development partners, especially in the provision of appropriate and adequate technologies.

There is indisputable evidence about the growing vulnerability of the oceans, which are our most significant common resource, and so critical to our existence. The "mounting problems" with fisheries, which are acknowledged in Agenda 21, remain largely unabated. Threats to the health, productivity and biodiversity of the marine environment have immediate repercussions for all island States, as they do for all of us. We believe that this special session must underscore the need to implement fully the commitments and provisions of important international agreements which have been negotiated since Rio for the improvement of the conservation and management of fish stocks, and for the protection of the marine environment, and we note in particular the conservation of coral reefs, all within the overall legal framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We look forward to a successful International Year of the Ocean next year and to the financing of international waters initiatives by and through the Global Environment Facility.

Finally, for most small island developing States tourism is one of the rapidly expanding economic activities. Concerned with the need for mainstream tourism to be well planned and environmentally sustainable, the small island States have put priority on

development policies that embrace eco-tourism as a growing resource. We encourage the continued support of the international community in our capacity-building efforts for long-term sustainable tourism development, within the context of the Barbados Programme of Action, and we look forward to increased involvement and environmental responsibility by the private sector.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Samoa, who spoke on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, for his statement.

Mr. Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Chairman of the delegation of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. João Serodio de Almeida, Vice Minister of the Environment of Angola.

Mr. João Serodio de Almeida, Vice Minister of the Environment of Angola, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Serodio de Almeida (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): In June 1992, Angola, along with many other countries of the world, was present at and participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and subscribed to its conclusions and recommendations. In view of the scope of the Conference and the importance of the resolutions and conventions that were adopted, we have no doubts about classifying it as one of the major victories of the United Nations.

Since Rio 1992, the world has changed its view of local, regional and international environmental problems. Since that time, there can be no discussion of development, economics, poverty or social welfare without taking into account the environmental dimension.

Soon after the 1992 Rio Conference, which marked a new stage in global life, Angola was again engulfed in a civil war promoted by interests alien to our population. This was even more serious and destructive than previous conflicts. We believe that a new period of peace is now on the horizon, and we are now striving to make it a long and lasting period.

We now count on United Nations assistance to achieve the peace so ardently desired by all Angolans. We take this opportunity once again to express our deepest gratitude to all our sister nations that have helped us without reservation. The United Nations has endeavoured to keep a special force of Blue Helmets and, most especially, a highly competent, patient and persistent negotiating team in Angola.

We are now able to take decisive measures to fulfil our responsibilities under the international conventions spawned by Agenda 21 and to join the global efforts to protect the environment in all its facets.

On 11 April 1997 the National Assembly of Angola ratified the Convention on biological diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification. Our Parliament has already started deliberations with a view to ratifying the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Their Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, as well as the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Other conventions will follow in due course, as soon as we are prepared to put them into practice.

Angola's commitment to fulfil its environmental obligations was demonstrated in 1992. In spite of all the difficulties resulting from a long war, our Government created a secretariat of State for environment affairs. More recently, when a new Government was installed, this agency was elevated to the ministerial level.

Although Angola is now ready to play its role in the community of nations, we are also apprehensive about the results of five years' work on Agenda 21. We do not wish to repeat what has already been said at this special session. We support the statements on the need to fight poverty as a focal point of environmental preservation, as stated by the President of Zimbabwe, by the current Chairman of the Group of 77 and China and by the President of Brazil.

Before, Angola was not prepared to receive any assistance to implement environmental projects and programmes. International assistance is now more necessary than ever. Until recently Angola was not prepared to implement environmental projects and programmes. Now, however, our nation can start to work in this area and needs all the international assistance it can get.

As a result of the long war, Angola has thousands of displaced persons, refugees and maimed people. But it also has a strong and determined people who need help to stand up and to move again.

The difficulties faced by developed countries in fulfilling their obligations regarding the transfer of technology and funds pledged at Rio in 1992 have caused anxieties in developing countries, which expected to carry out their programmes with the assistance of these developed countries. Knowing how difficult it is for developed countries to change direction, we hope those difficulties are caused by bureaucratic reasons and not by a deliberate resistance to such transfers. Nowadays, all political leaders know how urgent it is to reverse the trend of environmental destruction and the deterioration of natural resources.

Angola will soon enact a basic environmental law compelling all sectors of national life to publish legal instruments providing for more rational utilization of natural resources and for environmental protection. This new environmental law will include the most recent concepts for protecting biodiversity, such as user and polluter fees, special measures of protection for the urban environment and protection of local populations, with special attention given to those hindered by borders established without regard for their transborder interests.

The national programme for environmental management to be adopted by the Government will include environmental education using the school network and the mass media, with specialized programmes for the military and leaders; strengthening of all the agencies in charge of the environment, biodiversity protection and the development of eco-tourism; implementation of national environmental policies, starting in 1992, at the municipal level, as recommended by the World Bank and fully supported by Angola.

We recognize that although this is an ambitious programme, it is an urgent one. The Government is determined to launch it as soon as possible. Assistance from the international community, and especially from the United Nations, will be required for its successful implementation.

Angola is blessed with a large territory, rich biological diversity and natural resources that attract great international interest. In spite of the long wars it has been subjected to, its natural resources are mostly intact. International assistance is required to protect the country from the predatory exploitation of those resources.

As I close, allow me to make an appeal to all the participants at this forum to find the efficient mechanisms necessary to render speedy assistance to the neediest countries. As we help others, we will be helping ourselves.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice Minister of the Environment of Angola for his statement.

Mr. Joâo Serodio de Almeida, Vice Minister of the Environment of Angola, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Narendra Bikram Shah, Chairman of the delegation of Nepal.

Mr. Narendra Bikram Shah, Chairman of the delegation of Nepal, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Shah (Nepal): The Earth Summit was one of the significant events in United Nations history. It recreated global awareness regarding sustainable development and environmental protection. The global consensus achieved at the Summit, with the participation of the leaders of 172 Governments and many non-governmental organizations and members of civil societies, resulted in an agreed agenda for the twenty-first century with the sustainable development of all humankind at its base. Five years down the road from Rio, the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly assumes great importance, not only because it will review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21, but also because it will, hopefully, succeed in lending fresh impetus to our common effort for sustainable development.

It is disheartening to hear from the leaders of many countries that the Rio momentum is in recession, if not actually on the verge of collapse. The reports of the experts are equally ominous. A lack of safe drinking water for more than one third of the world's population, continuing soil degradation, increasing global warming, unchecked urbanization, influxes of refugees, population growth and a failure to protect the fragile mountain ecosystem are some of the threatening signs.

We have acknowledged time and again that sustainable development can be achieved and

environmental degradation checked only by attacking poverty at its root. But more and more people are sliding down into comparatively poorer conditions in developing countries. Absolute poverty has largely become the characteristic of the least developed countries. A vast chunk of humanity is trapped in poverty. We should not allow this significant segment of the world population to be the weakest link in the global environmental and sustainable development chain. We all know that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

The commitments made at the Rio Summit must be more scrupulously honoured by both developed and developing countries, which bear common but differentiated responsibilities. New and additional resources and environmentally sound technology were identified as the critical inputs for arresting worldwide environmental degradation and achieving sustained economic growth and the sustainable development of humankind. We must renew our commitments and honour them with increased vigour.

Nepal has faithfully abided by the commitments we made in Rio. The Constitution of my country, which predates the Earth Summit, embodies the protection and preservation of the environment and wildlife and environment-friendly physical development as matters of State policy. Nepal is a party to all the Conventions that have emanated from Rio, those on biodiversity, climate change and desertification. Internally, we have set up the mechanisms required to implement our commitments. We have created a new Government ministry with a particular focus on the environment and population. Our commitment is further reflected in the establishment of a high-level Environmental Protection Council headed by the Prime Minister himself.

Nepal holds the view that the participation of women is of the utmost importance in sustainable development. The role of civil society is no less important. We are also firm in our belief that the United Nations system should play a leading role in pursuing the goals set by Agenda 21.

Nepal is ready and willing to join hands with the rest of the world in the search for a peaceful and prosperous world through sustainable development. However, for least developed countries, which lack resources but have a strong will to move towards sustainable development, much more needs to be done by the international community. Their national efforts to eradicate poverty must be supplemented by international support measures on a much larger scale. Owing to our physical handicap of being a landlocked country, Nepal has obvious additional difficulties in participating on equal terms in the global trade regime and attracting foreign direct investments. For some time to come in the foreseeable future, for countries in a situation like Nepal's, foreign direct investment cannot be a substitute for official development assistance. Countries such as ours, which are also following the path of liberal economic policies and an open market system in a democratic set-up with a deep commitment to human rights, deserve greater attention and support.

In his address to the Assembly last Tuesday, the President of the Republic of Maldives who is Chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), mentioned the Delhi Declaration of the Ministers of Environment of the member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, who met in April this year. As the President stated, the Declaration emphasizes the disappointment of the countries of the region, extending from the high Himalayas to the low-lying atolls of the Indian Ocean, with the laggardly implementation of the Rio commitments. At the ninth Summit of the SAARC, held in Malé last month, it was decided to institutionalize the meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the region as an annual event. At the Summit the Ministers of the Environment were also instructed to consider the signing of a South Asian regional treaty on the environment in the context of existing international conventions on the subject. The countries of South Asia have demonstrated their resolve to implement their commitments made in Rio and to go further. It is only proper that the international community should supplement such initiatives.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Nepal for his statement.

Mr. Narendra Bikram Shah, Chairman of the delegation of Nepal, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergio Alejandro Zelaya, Vice-Minister of National Resources and the Environment of Honduras.

Mr. Sergio Alejandro Zelaya, Vice-Minister of National Resources and the Environment of Honduras, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Zelaya (Honduras) (*interpretation from Spanish*): To a considerable extent, Honduras has complied with the commitments entered into five years

ago at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The keener awareness and the participation of the people of Honduras are ensuring positive results in the various activities related to the issues dealt with at the meeting.

Consideration of the impact of the environment on development has enabled us to take decisions on the basis of sustainable growth, against a backdrop of democracy and participation.

In this context, since 1994 Honduras has been harmonizing relevant legislation and carrying out environmental auditing of production processes. Thus, environmental licences have to be granted before industry can operate in the country. Our air is protected through the ratification and implementation of relevant international agreements. This shows our desire to preserve a healthy environment for the well-being of our society. Rules, regulations and policies for controlling harmful emissions into the atmosphere and the pollution of the land and sea are also given priority in our programme. In this context, we have stopped the importation of leaded petrol and have initiated a healthy process of industrial re-engineering.

Honduras has ratified and is implementing international environmental agreements, such as the Convention on the Law of the Sea, International Labour Organization Convention No. 169, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and agreements on the regional protection of forests and biodiversity and the agreements of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America. This Alliance represents a regional and national strategy whose basic principle is to bring about integral changes in Central American economic, social, cultural and environmental development, with every aspect geared towards respecting all forms of life, improving the quality of life, preserving and respecting the diversity of the planet and our region and respecting human rights and multiculturalism in our region.

I would like to point out that in 1996 we established the National Council on Sustainable Development in which governmental, non-governmental and business-oriented organizations participate. We have taken the first steps towards setting up local councils on sustainable development in accordance with the administrative aspects of Agenda 21.

The private sector of Honduras, growing aware of the environmental dimension in development and of the conservation of resources, has formed a business council on sustainable development.

Honduras is a highly forested country and more than three quarters of our land is covered by forest. Hence the forest's importance as a carbon-gas emissions sink. Our Congress is now considering a law on land reform, which will form a part of our natural-resource strategy, adapted to the characteristics of each region of the country. We have established a National Council on Protected Areas and the National System of Protected Areas and Biodiversity for the management and monitoring of 2.5 million hectares, which constitute 25 per cent of our national territory. Of this, 800,000 hectares form one of the 22 Heritage of Humanity sites throughout the world. I am referring to the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve in the north-eastern part of our country.

The growing threat to the environment is a constant concern of our country and of the region. It is a serious problem that must be addressed immediately, taking account of the particular situation of each country. Environmental deterioration is a universal problem arising primarily from the activities of the developed and industrialized countries, which are motivated by lust for profit and consumerism. Let this therefore be an opportunity for reflection and agreement on radical changes in those countries.

We believe that economic policies must be better coordinated with environmental policies and that the sustainability of our natural resources is essential, today and in the future, if we are to eliminate poverty and achieve equitable, just and participatory development throughout the world.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-Minister of National Resources and the Environment of Honduras for his statement.

Mr. Sergio Alejandro Zelaya, Vice-Minister of National Resources and the Environment of Honduras, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Emilio Izquierdo, Chairman of the delegation of Ecuador.

Mr. Emilio Izquierdo, Chairman of the delegation of Ecuador, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Izquierdo (Ecuador) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Government of Ecuador at this special session of the General Assembly.

My country attaches the highest priority to environmental protection policies. The achievements of past years have increased our citizens' awareness of the importance of the role environmental issues play in the development processes of our countries. These policies have also allowed the various States bodies to establish the appropriate coordination mechanisms to disseminate information, policies and regulations, among other things, on issues related to biodiversity, the elimination of lead in gasoline and the establishment of an inventory of toxic and dangerous wastes.

Ecuador's priority is to raise the standard of living of all its citizens through the full achievement of the social goals laid out in its education, health, housing and development plans, all of which are in harmony with the universal commitments of the plans of action of the international Conferences that have been held on environment and development, human rights, population, women and human settlements, and of the Social Summit.

Ecuador's social policies seek the full participation of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in the country's socio-economic development, as well as their access to its benefits. With this in mind, Ecuador considers it necessary to promote initiatives to reevaluate the rural sector; implement appropriate land-ownership policies to benefit the indigenous communities; encourage internal and external financial mechanisms to allow them successfully to develop their productive capacities; and strengthen the protection of their traditional and ancestral knowledge and practices regarding biodiversity.

Within the next few months, Ecuador will be threatened by the "El Niño" phenomenon, now aggravated by climate change effects. Scientific predictions forecast that its impact this year will be as severe as in 1982, or even worse. The problem which Ecuador is anticipating should be met by international solidarity and support to help prevent and mitigate its effects.

On 30 April, the President of Ecuador proclaimed Emergency Decree 245, declaring the conservation of the Galapagos archipelago ecosystems as a national priority. These ecosystems have been affected by accelerated population growth, the increase of illegal fishing and the early effects of El Niño, which has had a severe impact in that region. This Decree, widely broadcast, has received the support of internally based organizations and the international community. It reaffirms the willingness of the Ecuadorean Government to pursue the protection of the Galapagos archipelago, given its unique environmental conditions.

At the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in December 1996, Ecuador proposed the adoption of strong commitments to making significant progress in compliance with the agreements of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. My country also highlighted the great importance of fostering sustainable development, whose objective is to harmonize human activities and nature by means of policies and actions that will achieve an efficient and fair economy, a just society and the preservation of the environment, in order to ensure a better quality of life for present and future generations in a safe environment.

Ecuador's efforts over the past five years have been strenuous, especially in the activation of the legal and institutional framework through the creation of the Institute of Forests and Natural Areas, the Environmental Advisors Commission of the Presidential Office, the Ministry of the Environment, the consideration by Congress of the approval of the Law on Environment, the shaping of Ecuador's environmental plan, the entry into force of the Law on Biodiversity, the participation of non-governmental organizations in various aspects of the national decision-making process, the strengthening of the "polluter pays" principle through the implementation of the National Environmental Impact System and, most importantly, the drafting of basic environmental Ecuadorean policies.

A few weeks ago, the Ecuadorean Government received a popular mandate to reform our Constitution, into which incorporation of a special section on the environment is therefore already in progress.

Ecuador considers it necessary to stimulate greater civilian participation in all phases of environmental issues. To that effect, a national system of environmental impact assessment has been formulated and implemented.

After five years of internal efforts, we are still not satisfied with the implementation of Agenda 21 in global terms. There has been no transfer of technology and international financial assistance has decreased. I must therefore point out that my delegation has been highly

receptive to the statements delivered at this forum by various Heads of State and Government, especially those from the industrialized countries, who have expressed their willingness to increase their financial flow in order to reach the goals we set forth five years ago.

My delegation also believes that it is necessary to implement a system of transparency in commerce that would allow the integration of the developing economies into the world economy.

Ecuador, an Amazonian country, possesses great ecological and forest diversity. It has one of the richest biodiversity reserves in the world. The Galapagos Islands, a world natural heritage site, are the sanctuary in which unique species have made their homes and the genetic memory of many forms of life on Earth is to be found.

My country therefore visualizes the future with great optimism. However, this future will certainly need to be built on the efforts of the Ecuadorean people and, without a doubt, on the international community's compliance with the commitments made under the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, the principles and challenges of which Ecuador wishes here to reaffirm.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Ecuador for his statement.

Mr. Emilio Izquierdo, Chairman of the delegation of Ecuador, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

Mr. James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Speth (United Nations Development Programme): We have to be frank with ourselves. Since Rio there have been many real gains, but we have also failed in many undertakings. Progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 has not been as rapid or as far-reaching as we would have all hoped.

At the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), we have tried to stress that capacity-building at the country level is essential for sustainable development and that policies to eliminate poverty must be an integral part of any sustainable development effort. We know that extreme poverty can be eliminated in one generation with enough will, wisdom and work. We have no ethical alternative but to take on this challenge with the seriousness it deserves.

As the task manager for chapter 37 of Agenda 21, dealing with capacity-building in developing countries, UNDP and our many partners have undertaken to orchestrate an ambitious programme of capacity development. Through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, UNDP has promoted close cooperation within the United Nations family of agencies. Important lessons can be learned from this experience.

To be successful, capacity-development programmes must be based on real needs and local ownership. Policies and efforts driven by global concerns alone are not sustainable. Moreover, capacity-building must be long term and must be well coordinated among donors. In particular, and I would stress this, we must be aware that international agreements today impose a long series of uncoordinated and difficult planning requirements on developing countries. Rationalization of these requirements is clearly in order, as is joint, coordinated support for country-owned and country-driven strategies.

UNDP's Capacity 21 programme, which was established in response to Agenda 21, has helped to fund projects in over 40 countries in the last five years. The design of national plans and the formulation of national strategies for conservation and environmental protection have been the strongest success areas during these five years. Countries such as China, the Philippines and Bolivia all have prepared national Agenda 21 documents. Others such as the Gambia, Malawi and Nepal have built upon existing national environmental plans to take on the challenges of Agenda 21. Over 40 African countries today have coordinating mechanisms to produce such plans.

In India and in Costa Rica, for example, capacity-building programmes have brought "green accounting" methods into their national policy and decision-making. The Philippines is intent on becoming the first of the "Green Tigers" of Asia. Capacity 21 programmes in Malawi, Morocco and Tanzania are supporting the efforts of planning bodies in those countries to incorporate sustainable development concepts and procedures into their overall national planning. These are very notable achievements for this Capacity 21 programme, and UNDP strongly urges the continuation of Capacity 21 for the remainder of this century.

We also continue to be a strong partner, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank, in the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has now become the interim funding mechanism for both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This month, UNDP celebrates a milestone of sponsoring 1,000 GEF projects, which are bringing over half a billion dollars to bear on the environmental challenges threatening recipient and donor countries.

With respect to forests, UNDP supports the programme of action that has emerged from this Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. We urge that the recommendations move forward. UNDP, together with other members of the task force, is committed to assist countries in building the capacities required for the sustainable management of national forest resources.

In our recent report, *Energy after Rio*, we review the links between energy and social and environmental issues. We emphasize the need to develop strategies for sustainable energy focusing on energy efficiency, renewable resources and clean energy technologies of all types. Commendable progress has been made by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in the area of water, and I urge that the newly proposed programme also move forward.

In each of these three areas — forests, energy and water — a key problems is that almost all of us, North and South, subsidize the misuse and overuse of these precious resources. These subsidies are not sound or justifiable, either economically or environmentally. In a world of neoclassical economics, we should follow its first rule: to get the prices right.

UNDP has deployed significant efforts to support implementation of the United Nations conventions. We have offered to host the global mechanism established under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, to promote resource mobilization.

On the issue of climate, the burden to act first and to act most rests squarely with the industrial nations, particularly the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members. It is they whose leadership and action are essential to validate the legitimacy of this awesome challenge. Yet it is the poorer countries that are likely to be the hardest hit by climate change, so we must move forward to implement restrictions under the climate Convention.

Since Rio, the United Nations Development Programme has dramatically increased our spending on Rio objectives. We are now spending a fourth of our total programme resources on environment conservation and resource management. This reflects the real commitment of the developing world. But the rich countries have failed utterly to uphold their end of the bargain struck at Rio. They have not increased their development assistance, as promised — in fact, it has decreased — and many have not set a good example in their own domestic policies and actions regarding sustainable development. I therefore urge OECD members to begin by restoring official development assistance to its previous high in real terms.

The continuing deterioration of the environment and the expanding need to address environmental issues increasingly on an international scale both underscore the contribution an international entity can and must make to developing and monitoring international environmental agreements and to promoting international environmental protection and conservation.

We need an effective partner at the international level to work with the World Trade Organization and with other new entities. We need a strong international body to facilitate the work of the national environmental authorities at the regional and global levels.

I hope that we can build our sister agency, the United Nations Environment Programme, with a clear focus on international norms to meet these urgent needs.

With the strengthening of UNEP, we will have a stronger United Nations family to support the world community — both national Governments and civil society — in making the vision of Agenda 21 a reality.

Mr. James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization.

Mr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Nakajima (World Health Organization): As we mark the fifth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, I wish to express my gratitude to the Secretariat for its close cooperation with us in implementing Agenda 21. We look forward to the continuation of this excellent partnership.

In 1992, the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) Commission on Health and the Environment provided the Earth Summit with an in-depth analysis of the links between health and the environment. Many of the findings of that report were incorporated into Agenda 21 and inspired the first principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which affirms the importance of health for sustainable development.

Health, the environment and human development are inseparable. Infant mortality rates, for example, have long been recognized as an essential indicator of human development. Improved access to basic infrastructure and social services, including primary health care services — which we view as a most important element — not only increases life expectancy but also improves the quality of life. This, together with the promotion of women's and children's health, has resulted in slowing down population growth globally, thereby reducing pressure on the environment. Conversely, poverty, deterioration of the environment and declining natural resources are causing serious health hazards and inequities. Because of these obvious links, many of the local Agenda 21 initiatives have been aimed at improving both environmental conditions and health status.

For the health sector to become a full partner in sustainable development, change is needed in the existing health systems of most countries. These still tend to favour curative and clinical approaches rather than preventive and public health approaches. We know, however, that increases in respiratory diseases are directly linked to air pollution. Similarly, for the effective control of many tropical diseases such as malaria, we need drugs and vaccines but, even more, we need vigorous policies for environmental management. The emergence of the ebola virus and the epidemics it has caused in Africa has been associated with the encroachment of human beings on the forest and its wildlife.

Rapid uncontrolled urbanization inevitably creates ideal vector-breeding conditions triggering the resurgence of disease vectors. Outbreaks of plague in India and the renewed virulence of dengue haemorrhagic fever in Latin America are clear examples. Climate change will affect the whole globe. The geographic distribution of insect vectors will be modified, leading to an increase in the potential for transmission of many vector-borne diseases, particularly tropical diseases.

In all parts of the world, inadequate environmental management and shortsighted development policies are causing serious damage not only to our limited natural resources but, first and foremost, to the health of our peoples. All countries have to give attention to the health implications of changes in the environment and make them a part of their environmental impact assessments.

Governments must provide the political and legal framework for sound environmental management and for agricultural and industrial development policies that take into account current and foreseeable health needs. The trend towards privatization must not lead Governments to neglect this responsibility. Governments must also ensure that essential health protection and care are available to all. With this in view, health sector reform should aim at strengthening primary health care and those public health functions which are most important for achieving the goals of Agenda 21.

WHO is in the process of reformulating its health-for-all policy to help its member States respond to public health challenges as they emerge in a rapidly changing world. A major effort is needed in all countries, and particularly in developing countries, to gather disaggregated information on the environmental determinants of disease. Epidemiological assessments of this kind imply the availability of a world-wide network of monitoring stations, reference centres and trained personnel. Intersectoral coordination must take place at the international level, but it also requires the participation of all countries, with the provision of adequate financial and human resources to obtain the necessary information and make it accessible to all concerned.

The Commission on Sustainable Development will soon be adopting its programme of work and defining the responsibilities to be carried out by the various partners involved. As task manager for health, WHO looks forward to strengthening its mechanisms for coordination with other agencies and within its area of competence, and its support to countries as they develop their policies on industry, technology transfer, capacity building, education, science and awareness-raising. In all these fields, WHO has accumulated useful experience which it can make available to its partners. As the executing agency of the International Programme on Chemical

Safety, operating jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), WHO has facilitated the assessment of risks to human health and the environment from exposure to chemicals and helped to reach agreement on acceptable standards of safety. WHO is also the administering agency of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, which fosters consultation and cooperation between Governments, nongovernmental organizations and the industry.

WHO is actively involved in the recently established Africa 2000 initiative. This initiative aims at enabling countries to expand their water-supply and sanitation services, using low-cost technology and appropriately trained staff. This is also in line with the plan of action recommended by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)/WHO Joint Committee on Health Policy to achieve the goals set by the World Summit for Children.

Our successful campaigns against river blindness, guinea-worm disease and, in Latin America, Chagas' disease have highlighted the crucial importance of community participation in ensuring that gains in health status and environmental management can be sustained.

WHO will continue to carry out these and our many other health interventions that have a strong environmental component. Protecting and promoting people's health in all countries means providing them with enhanced opportunities for human development and the development of the environment.

The Acting President: I thank the Director-General of the World Health Organization for his statement.

Mr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Ms. Yolanda Kakabadse, President of the IUCN — The World Conservation Union, speaking on behalf of the Scientific and Technological Community Major Group.

Ms. Yolanda Kakabadse, President of the IUCN — The World Conservation Union, was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Kakabadse (IUCN — The World Conservation Union) (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the members of International Council of Scientific Unions, Greenpeace, The World Conservation Union and many other organizations involved in the environment and natural resource management, I wish to dedicate this statement to the memory of Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau, who died two days ago. He was a great leader in the defence of the planet's natural resources.

The experience of the Scientific and Technological Community Major Group in the implementation of Agenda 21 over these past five years is that the health of our planetary ecosystem has deteriorated and that the possibility of an acceptable standard of living has become less attainable for many of the planet's citizens.

Recent scientific research has shown that species loss continues unabated, with one-quarter of the mammal species on Earth in danger of extinction, and marine species consistently overexploited; that human activities have a direct impact on the global climate; and that degradation of the environment is directly linked with a decline in human health.

Accurate and objective scientific advice is a fundamental requirement for the implementation of the Earth Summit agreements. Our leaders depend on this advice to identify both the problems and the solutions associated with sustainable development. They rely on scientific objectivity faithfully to monitor the impact of their decisions. They depend on scientific independence to develop predictive models to explore policy options, and on technological achievement to provide solutions to global problems.

Since Rio, further evidence of the inextricable linkages between health, human well-being and environmental quality has been established. As a result of unchecked environmental degradation, we anticipate an increasing number of human health crises, involving the spread of infectious diseases, more cases of malnutrition and increasing health problems associated with global atmospheric change. Scientists have documented health impacts such as the disruption of endocrine system functions as a result of toxic chemicals entering into the environment from agriculture and industry.

Proactive environmental health strategies are needed that include adequate research funding to address the linkages between health and environment, with, I should like to stress, particular emphasis on the most common chronic diseases affecting the poor. We underline the fact that human needs and interests are totally consonant with, and provide compelling justification for, strong environmental protection measures.

Such strong measures require that we invest adequately in the development of scientific capacity and in improving access to technology. Members of our Major Group come from the private, governmental and non-governmental sectors. The requirements of sustainable development demand effective partnerships between these and other sectors. Science is, and will continue to be, very costly. Much scientific research is funded for military or commercial purposes. While we derive some benefits from research undertaken for and by industry, we require independent, objective scientific research and assessment, and we cannot depend upon private sector funding for scientific support. Research for sustainable development should be supported both through direct investment and through policies that provide incentives, such as tax benefits and subsidies.

It is likewise regrettable that the international institutional framework has not been able consistently to support sustainable development research, with a long-term vision that includes sustainable financing. The weakness of our global environmental institutions is a major constraint, which should be taken into account in the restructuring of the United Nations system. We call upon all States to foster greater coherence in scientific and technological capacity-building in order consciously to support science in the service of humankind. We need to strengthen the action proposed in Agenda 21 to address basic environmental degradation, working especially through the processes set in motion in Rio.

Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, we urge concerted action using a precautionary approach: to prevent the introduction of alien and genetically modified organisms into the environment; to ensure that policies for the protection of intellectual property rights respect scientific achievement while providing appropriate incentives to local communities, farmers, and indigenous peoples for the conservation of ecosystems, species, and genetic resources; and to protect healthy ecosystems through networks of protected areas, both on land and in the sea, while working to restore degraded ecosystems.

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we stress that there are measurable, anthropogenic impacts on the global climate, that these impacts are on the rise, and that continued unchecked growth in greenhouse gas concentrations will result in dire ecological, social, and economic consequences. We call upon the parties to identify target concentration levels and to adopt concrete emission- reduction targets to meet these levels.

We also ask that independent scientific processes be used to set criteria for the sustainable use of natural resources that take into account the effective functioning of associated ecosystems, especially in regard to fisheries and forests.

We are concerned about global contamination from toxic chemicals used in industry and agriculture. A global agreement for the elimination of persistent organic pollutants, as called for at the nineteenth session of the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council, is a priority, and we urge swift action on this front. Additional research in sustainable agricultural systems is also needed.

In closing, the IUCN — The World Conservation Union, the International Council of Scientific Unions and other scientific and technological groups call on all States to fulfil their obligations and commitments associated with the Earth Summit.

The Acting President: I thank the President of the IUCN — The World Conservation Union for her statement.

Ms. Yolanda Kakabadse, President of the IUCN — The World Conservation Union, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.